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June 1966

TRANSLATION

SOURCE: "Meie Elu" ("Our Life"), 12 May, 1966 - Toronto Estonian newspaper, frequently sympathetic to Heine and the "nationalists".

HOW HEINE'S TRILOGY CAME ABOUT

Author Arved Viirlaid Relates

"Since Ahto Valter crossed the ocean, the name of Estonia has never received such extended treatment by the newspapers on this continent as is the case now within the last couple of weeks in connection with the Heine-Raus lawsuit", states author Arved Viirlaid when we asked him to relate his observations and impressions from the days when "Vaim ja Ahelad" (COMMENT: This is the first book, "Spirit and the Chains", the English version has the title, "Rain for the River") was created. Many weeks were spent with Eerik Heine whose life, struggles and sufferings were formed into a literary work as seen by the writer's eye of A. Viirlaid. This book has been a best seller in our emigre group, it has been much discussed, it has been called a fruit of fantasy, but no one can deny its effect on the reader. Through an English translation it has introduced the sufferings of Estonian people borne with unbroken spirit to other nations. "Since I participated in popularizing Eerik Heine through my novels, I would like to express my thoughts for the purpose of clarifying the situation and understanding Eerik Heine", he added agreeably.

For what reason did you feel it necessary to meet Eerik Heine and seek literary material from his life story?

"As the readers know, most of my literary creations are concerned with the life and hopeless struggle of the Estonian people in the years following World War II. Since this topic is so close to me, I am interested in every person who has escaped with fresh information to this side of the Iron Curtain. "Ristideta Hauad" ("Graves without Crosses") for example, is based on the experiences of myself, my closest companions and a comrade at arms who came two years later from Estonia."

How did you actually become acquainted with Heine, was this a result of previous contacts or a new relation?

"When I heard in 1956 about Eerik Heine's arrival as a German POW to West Germany, I saw in him primarily a source for a literary creation. This was accentuated even before Heine's arrival in Toronto by having become knowledgeable about his participation in the resistance movement as a schoolboy, his arrest in 1940 and his exchange for Russian political prisoners with the Germans during the last days of Ribbentrop-Molotov honeymoon in the spring of 1941. So I knew a chapter from his life even before meeting him personally - a youngster in Germany with a shaved head and front teeth kicked in. I knew about his words, stated in 1941: "My sweetheart is Estonia!" - and I waited for him with the true interest of a writer."

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Did the idea of describing his life story come from you or did Heine make a wish to have his memories put into writing?

"When I met the future hero of my novels, I almost immediately proposed to write about his past experiences. Worn out and partly still living in World War II, he regarded my intentions coolly. I explained the importance of my idea and only after emphasizing that a novel based on his experiences could become an example and stimulating experience to our youths growing up in foreign lands, did his attitude become more positive. Even then he did not agree immediately, but only received a promise not to give the source material to anyone else. Only after reading my novels, "Tormiaasta" ("The Year of the Storm") and "Ristideta Hauad" ("Graves without Crosses") did he give me permission to use his past as source for a novel.

Since our residences at that time were relatively close, we met almost daily throughout several months. The further I reached into his story, the more I became enchanted. Most of all I was impressed by the discovery that despite all tremendous sufferings, the story teller had managed to remain human and calm. Because of this I felt sympathy for him, since it is my belief that betrayal of humanity for the sake of an idea is the most refined crime. I discovered in him a philosophy which by facing death is so strong that at times it seems unrealistic. This is how nationalistic feelings can become a religion."

How was the raw source material formulated into a literary work and how much of it corresponds to Heine's real life - how much is your creative fantasy?

"The writing of 'Vaim ja Ahelad' ('The Spirit and the Chains') took me three times as long as I had envisioned. Much of the manuscript went into the wastepaper basket with a simple remark by the story teller: "It was not like this." I can testify, however, that in this novel there is more of Eerik Heine's real life than any reader could imagine. Naturally one had to keep in mind that the novel would not endanger any lives among those in the homeland. In the case of 'Kustuvad Tuled' ('The Dimming Lights') sections dealing with the life in the forest are purely a literary creation, at the same time, however, true to life when dealing with events such as the train robbery, the midnight wedding, battles, the great deportation and the involvement of the forest brotherhood, the trip to Karelia, the plan to escape by using a balloon, etc, etc. Naturally, the characters and much of their personal relations are creations of my fantasy since the story teller did not have a movie camera along."

Since your works have publicized Eerik Heine's life story before the eyes of the world, do you think that in some way these could be responsible for such a serious accusation that has been made against him?

"I see personally that my writing of 'Vaim ja Ahelad' ('The Spirit and the Chains') especially lead Eerik Heine to a thorny path in emigration. This showed the old fighter the new ways, it was like a lesson to him. My novel was not even finished when he came out with the movie idea for 'Legendi Loojad' ('Creators of a Legend'). Many close to him know the difficulties he overcame to realize this idea, thanks to the enthusiasm and sacrifices of the actors.

With the book and the movie, Eerik Heine again became Eerik Horn from Siberia and the woods of Estonia. The battleground was different - the continent of North America. The enemy remains the same."

Knowing Heine closely, what assumptions could you make from the recent situation?

"As to the future, we can only make predictions. We can arrive at the truth, although hopes for this are scarce. The best preconditions for arriving at truth is that a democratic society would not permit such heavy violation of the principle of individual rights as has been committed in Heine's case by the CIA."

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JURI RAUS